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St. Helena

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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I. General

1. The Territory of St. Helena,[1] which is administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, consists of the main island of St. Helena and two dependencies: the island of Ascension and a group of islands forming the dependency of Tristan da Cunha.

2. Situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately 1,900 kilometres from Angola and 2,900 kilometres from Brazil, the Territory covers a total land area of 412 square kilometres. Ascension lies 1,200 kilometres to the north-west of St. Helena, and Tristan da Cunha and the other small islands forming that dependency are approximately 2,400 kilometres to the south of it. St. Helena, where Jamestown, the capital of the Territory, is located, is the largest island, with an area of 122 square kilometres. It has a tropical climate tempered by trade winds that blow throughout the year.

3. According to the most recent information provided by the administering Power, in March 1999, the population of St. Helena, excluding its dependencies, was 4,919 persons, approximately one third of which reside in Jamestown.

II. Constitutional and political developments

4. The St. Helena Constitution Order of 1988, which entered into force on 1 January 1989, replaced the Constitution of St. Helena and dependencies introduced on 1 January 1967. Under the new Constitution, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief (who is appointed by the Queen) administers the Government. He is assisted by an Executive Council and a Legislative Council.

5. The Legislative Council for St. Helena consists of the Speaker, three ex officio members (the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Attorney-General) and 12 elected members. The Executive Council is presided over by the Governor and consists of the ex officio members mentioned above and five of the elected members of the Legislative Council. Although a member of both the Legislative Council and the Executive Council, the Attorney-General has no vote in either body.

6. Elections are held by secret ballot at intervals of not more than four years by universal adult suffrage for those aged 18 years and older. Although two political parties are nominally in existence, since 1976 they have been inactive and elections have been held on a non-partisan basis.

7. The judicial system, based on the laws of the United Kingdom, is administered by the Supreme Court (there is a non-resident Chief Justice) and a Magistrate's Court presided over by the senior of the three magistrates sitting at a session. There is also a Juvenile Court and a Small Debts Court. Provision exists for a Court of Appeal, consisting of three judges, which can sit at Jamestown or in London.

8. Additional information on constitutional and political developments in St. Helena is contained in previous working papers prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2071, paras. 4–8 and A/AC.109/2115, paras. 4–8).

9. On 17 March 1999, the Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, Mr. Robin Cook, submitted in the British House of Commons a White Paper entitled "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories", which enumerated changes in the status of the United Kingdom's Dependent Territories, including St. Helena and its dependencies. The title of the Territories would be changed from "British Dependent Territories" to "British Overseas Territories" to reflect the British Government's stated goal of partnership with those peoples.[2]

10. The stipulations in the White Paper most relevant to St. Helena are: the offer of British citizenship, and with it the right of abode in the United Kingdom to those that choose to accept it; a commitment to continuing financial assistance to those Territories, including St. Helena, that remain economically dependent on British aid; and the creation of an Overseas Territories Minister and a Council of the Overseas Territories, both having responsibility for the needs of Territories. The Council would include the Chief Ministers of each Overseas Territory and would convene annually, with a first meeting envisaged for September/October 1999.

11. The issue of full citizenship rights has remained important for St. Helena. In 1997, a delegation of the island's legislative council held discussions on the matter with officials at the Foreign Office in London. In 1998, at a conference held in London following the Foreign Office review of the United Kingdom's relationship with its Dependent Territories, councillors from St. Helena made renewed appeals to settle and work in the United Kingdom. In the White Paper, the administering Power stated that British citizenship — and so the right of abode — should be offered to those British Dependent Territories citizens who did not already enjoy it and who wanted to take it up. The administering Power pointed out that in making that decision, the Government had taken into account

representations made by people in many Territories, not least those made on behalf of the people of St. Helena.

12. In the same White Paper, the administering Power renewed its commitment to providing economic aid to St. Helena to finance infrastructure projects, expert personnel and budgetary aid. The current three-year £26 million package would be sustained.

III. Economic conditions

A. General

13. St. Helena possesses few natural resources. Agriculture, largely of a subsistence nature, is the main economic activity. Food production is insufficient to supply the island's needs and this, together with the lack of manufacturing industries, results in the importation of the vast majority of its requirements. St. Helena is an aid-dependent economy, relying upon resources from the United Kingdom for approximately 26 percent of its 1997–1998 public sector recurrent budget. In addition, it received 18 per cent in development aid. Virtually all of St. Helena's capital investment and the majority of the technical cooperation it receives is funded by the United Kingdom's Overseas Development Administration, now known as the Department for International Development, as well as the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The cost of living in St. Helena is higher than in the United Kingdom, owing to costs related to the remoteness of the island. The retail price index in February 1999 was 111.82 (base year November 1994 = 100), compared with 109.62 in February 1998. Of the individual consumption categories, household goods experienced the highest rate of inflation during the period under review.

B. Public finance

14. The main items of estimated revenue, including British Government grant-in-aid and expenditure for the 12-month period from 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999, were as shown in table 1.

15. The Territory's statement of assets and liabilities as at 31 March 1998 is shown in table 2.

Table 1
Revenues and expenditure, 1998/99[a]
(*Thousands of St. Helena pounds*)[b]

Revenues	
Direct taxes	824.7
Indirect taxes	1 315.2
Fines, fees and charges	320.1
Government rents and hires	94.1
Earnings of the Government	214.6
Treasury receipts	1 571.7
Reimbursements	2 421.3
Other	97.1
Total ordinary revenue	**6 858.8**
Grant-in-aid	3 264
Total (ordinary revenue + grant-in-aid)	**10 122.8**
Expenditures	
Government	1506.2
Finance and development	602.4
Pensions and gratuities	509.0
Public education	1 282.5
Public health	1 612.3
Social services	1 503.3
Agriculture and forestry	922 8
Public works	1 763 8
Public debt	350 0
Other	70 5
Total	**10 122.8**

[a] Actual numbers may vary due to rounding.

[b] The local currency is the St. Helena pound, which is equivalent to the United Kingdom pound sterling. Both St. Helena currency notes, introduced in 1976, and the United Kingdom pound sterling are legal tender.

Table 2
Statement of assets and liabilities as at 31 March 1998
(*St. Helena pounds*)

Liabilities		*Assets*	
Deposits	721 065	Cash held locally and by Crown Agents, London	2 295 389
Special funds			
Savings bank	12 587 860	Savings bank	12 502 690
Other funds	363 050	Investments	956 281
Consolidated fund	2 514 982	Development	(75 838)
Trust funds	24 859	Advances	533 294
Total	**16 211 816**		**16 211 816**

C. Development projects

16. The administering Power's current three-year aid package has a budget of £26 million. Estimated development aid expenditure for the period from 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999 is shown in table 3.

Table 3
Estimated development aid expenditure, 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999
(*Thousands of St. Helena pounds*)

Projects	*Approved total grant*	*Estimated expenditures*
Agriculture and forestry	1 106.0	170.0
Public utilities	916.2	489.6
Social and administrative services	80.0	4.0
Fisheries	30.0	32.3
Administrative and miscellaneous services	2 954.0	1 048.0
Total	**3 911.3**	**1 744.3**

17. UNDP's second country programme for St. Helena (1993–1996) focused on developing national capacities in two areas: (a) sustainable livelihoods; and (b) ensuring social protection throughout the transition from an aid-dependent economy dominated by the public sector to a self-financing economy, in which the private sector has an expanded role. During the course of the second country programme, a livestock project, executed by the Government, was designed to support the island's livestock production sector. In addition, a preparatory assistance project on the development of tourism, executed by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), was initiated in order to develop a project to provide wide-ranging support to the development of the island's fledgling tourism industry. Finally, a project on the implementation of a social security scheme, executed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), was established to design both a national, contribution-based social security scheme and the associated institutional framework to provide benefits and services to the population of St. Helena. The latter project has been postponed while the Government considers whether and how to undertake the long-term financial commitment that the scheme would entail.

18. In formulating the UNDP 1997–1999 country cooperation framework for St. Helena, it was agreed that a focus on employment and sustainable livelihoods would present the best prospect for the efficient use of UNDP resources. The emphasis is on private sector development, with special attention to enterprises linked to tourism. Implementation of the programme is organized into two umbrella projects, namely, (a) tourism development and (b) technical assistance and training. Both projects contain components that specifically address the special circumstances of women and other vulnerable populations. The projects are being executed by the Government; however, appropriate budget lines are being implemented by bodies such as WTO and ILO.

D. Agriculture, land tenure and livestock

19. During 1998/99, 214.8 cubic metres of timber were sold, and 1,098 kg of coffee were exported to the United Kingdom.

20. The Agriculture and Forestry Department provides support to smallholder producers, including agricultural loans, through a revolving credit fund, which provided loans totalling £23,209 in 1998/99.

21. In 1992, an agricultural water subsidy programme was introduced to reduce the impact on farmers of a considerable increase in the prices charged by the Government. During 1998/99, £8,508 was spent on water subsidy, representing about 38,045 cubic metres of water used for irrigation.

22. The number of department employees involved in agricultural and livestock services totalled 43, and estimated expenditure during 1998/99 was £922,810.

23. St. Helena has an environmental conservation programme aimed at preserving endangered endemic species and diversity of habitats. The plants that are unique to St. Helena form an important part of the Territory's heritage and could potentially increase tourism for the island. The World Conservation Union lists as endangered 40 per cent of the island's plants, while other conservationists insist that the actual proportion is higher still. Concerted efforts are being made to ensure their survival and conservation.[3] From 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999, some 7,286 varying species of endemic plants were sown on the island.

E. Fisheries

24. Employees at the St. Helena Fisheries Corporation during the year under review consisted of 18 workers, excluding fishermen.

25. Local fish sales and export statistics from 1990 to 1999 are shown in table 4.

Table 4
Local fish sales and exports, 1990–1999

	Local sales		*Exports*	
	Tons	*Value (pounds sterling)*	*Tons*	*Value (pounds sterling)*
1990/91	83.21	108 406	154.53	128 124
1991/92	88.91	118 782	26.66	38 399
1992/93	69.66	108 364	87.06	115 056
1993/94	68.93	107 516	168.85	189 593
1994/95	70.73	108 950	150.35	178 447
1995/96	162.48	123 034	199.95	276 922
1996/97	238.71	324 705	136.03	213 066
1997/98	103.03	97 697	301.30	204 897
1998/99	129.58	131 507	255.16	210 379

F. Industries

26. There is no large-scale industry on St. Helena. All crafts are practised on a cottage-industry basis, with technical, financial and marketing facilities provided by the Government through the St. Helena Development Agency, established in 1995. In the financial year 1998/99, the Agency approved a total of £107,575 in loans and £6,160 in grants. This financial assistance is focused on industries identified as having the greatest potential for development, namely, fishing, agriculture, tourism, exports and import substitution.

G. Transport, communications and utilities

27. Information on transport, communications and utilities is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 35–37). The island has over 100 kilometres of surfaced roads, to which 1.5 kilometres were added in 1998/99. During the period under review, the primary effort was on the maintenance of the existing road network.

28. Electricity, water and roads are supplied by the Public Works and Services Department, which employs approximately 273 workers. The Department's annual expenditure is £1.8 million and it receives income of £1.2 million through the sale of power, water and services. Expenditure on development aid work in 1998/99 was approximately £0.9 million.

29. A total of 367,000 cubic metres of treated water were supplied for domestic, commercial and agricultural purposes in the financial year 1998/99. A five-year development aid project, estimated at over £1 million, is in preparation. The project will aim to replace deteriorated pipes and tanks and conduct a feasibility study on improvements to the island's water intake.

30. The Department's Energy Division generated a total of 6,626,626 kilowatt-hours of electricity. An additional 43 consumers were connected to the island's power supply, bringing the total to 2,238.

31. The Foreign Office of the administering Power is currently conducting an investigation into transport links to the island, including an examination of the benefits of its own airport. The Foreign Office is negotiating with the United States of America with a view to opening up the Ascension island airstrip to civilian flights for the first time, and to examining the possibility of increasing the frequency of shipping to the Island.

H. Banking and credit

32. Information on banking and credit is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 38–39). Local currency in circulation as at 31 March 1999 was £2,975,610, comprising £2,553,970 in notes and £421,640 in coins. No additional information for the year under review has been received by the Secretariat.

I. International trade

33. St. Helena's main imports are food products and tobacco, motor spirits and fuel oil, animal feed, building materials, motor vehicles, machinery and spare parts. Its only exports are fish, handicrafts and coffee. Its main trading partners remain the United Kingdom and South Africa. Others partners include Brazil and Ascension. No commercial agreements were entered into during the period under review.

IV. Social conditions

34. Information on social conditions in the Territory is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2021, paras. 41–53). Unemployment was reported to be at about 18 per cent during the year under review, an increase from the reported rate of 7.8 per cent in 1991.[4] According to the administering Power, at the end of March 1999, there were 124 men and women, aged between 18 and 60, on community employment, and a further 147 men and 109 women registered as unemployed.

35. At the end of March 1999, 498 needy people were receiving income-related benefits, at weekly rates varying from £18.95 to £45.00. In addition, unemployment allowance was paid to 256 people, at rates varying from £12.80 to £40.00 per week.

36. According to the administering Power, recurrent public health expenditure in 1998/99 was £1,695,190, which is 16.9 per cent of the total Government recurrent expenditure. There is one general hospital in Jamestown and six rural health clinics on the island.

37. There are 12 public schools in the Territory. In the year under review, there were 123 teachers, of which 119 work full-time and 4 part-time. Total expenditure by the Education Department in 1998/99 is estimated to be £1,282,540, which is approximately 9.4 per cent of the total government recurrent expenditure.

V. Dependencies of St. Helena

A. Tristan da Cunha[5]

1. General

38. General information on geographic features and climate of Tristan da Cunha is contained in paragraphs 1 and 2 of the present working paper. Excluding expatriates, there were 288 islanders resident on Tristan da Cunha as of December 1998.

2. Constitutional and political developments

39. Information on constitutional and political developments in Tristan da Cunha is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2043, paras. 32–33). It was reported in December 1997 that Mr. Tony Lloyd, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, agreed that five eople from the dependency could seek employment in the United Kingdom every year.[6] In addition, dependency residents will receive the options of British citizenship and residency after parliamentary passage of the resolutions contained in the White Paper entitled "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories" (see paras. 4–10 above).

3. Economic conditions

40. Information on economic conditions in Tristan da Cunha is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2043, paras. 34–36). The 1998 budget estimates revenue at £744,534 and expenditure at £650,339. As of 31 December 1998, deposits at the local Post Office Savings Bank amounted to £230,974.

41. The standard of living has shown significant improvement in recent years, evidenced by high receipts at the island store, the main shopping facility. In addition, there is full employment for men and work for most women.

4. Social conditions

42. Information on social conditions in Tristan da Cunha is contained in a previous working paper prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/2043, paras. 37–39). In the year under review, one islander took advantage of government loans to build a house. The medical budget for the period from January to December 1998 was £103,000. The budget of the Education Department for the period from January to December 1998 was £44,365.

B. Ascension

43. The population of the island of Ascension was 1,102 as of 31 March 1997. Further information for the period ending in 1988 is contained in a previous working paper on St. Helena prepared by the Secretariat (A/AC.109/1071, paras. 119–129). No further substantive information has been received by the Secretariat since that time.

VI. Future status of the Territory

44. On 10 December 1997, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 52/77, a consolidated resolution on 12 Non-Self-Governing Territories, section IX of which was specifically devoted to St. Helena.

45. On 4 February 1998, the Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, Mr. Robin Cook, in a speech before the Dependent Territories

Association in London, announced that in his first months as Foreign Secretary, he had set in hand a review of the United Kingdom's stewardship of the Dependent Territories. A summary of the principles and key issues contained in the proposals to "modernize the United Kingdom's relations with the Territories" is contained in document A/AC.109/2102, paras. 70–81.

46. At the same meeting, in response to the speech made by the Foreign Secretary, a member of the Executive Council of St. Helena, Mr. Eric George, emphasized the need to have the Territory's citizenship rights restored as soon as possible, as a step towards a better future for St. Helena. However, he noted that, in order to obtain a permanent and lasting solution in the long term that would benefit both St. Helena and the United Kingdom, the constitutional relationship between the two had to be considered. St. Helena wished to give greater responsibility to the elected members of the Territory's legislature. St. Helena would be seeking to move into the new century with a constitution that would allow it to develop its Territory and improve its economy.

47. On 3 December 1998, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 53/67 a consolidated resolution on the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Referring to St. Helena specifically, the Assembly requested the administering Power to keep the Secretary-General informed of the wishes and aspirations of the people of the Territory regarding their future political status. The Assembly also requested the administering Power and relevant regional and international organizations to continue to support the efforts of the territorial Government to address the socio-economic development of the Territory.

48. The administering Power's White Paper, (see para. 9 above) proposes the granting of the option of British citizenship and the right of abode in the United Kingdom for island residents, as well as a renewed commitment to assisting St. Helena's economic development. The proposed legislation addresses many of the concerns noted by the Executive Council of St. Helena in its meetings with Foreign Office officials and, according to the administering Power, its passage by Parliament is expected as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Notes

[1] Information regarding St. Helena has been derived from a report transmitted to the Secretary-General by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations, on 11 May 1999.

[2] Information in paras. 5–10 is derived from "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Oversees Territories", White Paper submitted to the House of Commons on 17 March 1999 by the Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom and set out in document A/AC.109/1999/1, annex.

[3] "St. Helena Ecology is World's Most Endangered", by Brendan Boyle. *Reuters*, 1 March 1999.

[4] "South Atlantic Saints Fight for Island", by Brendan Boyle. *Reuters*, 27 December 1998.

[5] Information regarding Tristan da Cunha has been derived from a report transmitted to the Secretary-General by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations, on 24 October 1997.

[6] *Press Association Newsfile*, 5 December 1997.